

Death to the good man, preferable to life.

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A
S E R M O N

Preached in

Layton-Stone Chapel,

September 1, 1754,

BEING

The SUNDAY after the INTERMENT

OF

Mrs. ANN DUNSTER.

By WILLIAM TOTTON, M. A.

Fellow of St. John's College, CAMBRIDGE.

L O N D O N:

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W. Musgrave.



TO
MY MUCH ESTEEMED
AND
HONOURED FRIENDS
MR. AND MRS. BOSANQUET,
MISS BOSANQUETS,
AND
MISS JACKSONS,
THIS DISCOURSE
IS
WITH ALL RESPECT,
AND
GRATITUDE
INSCRIBED,
BY THEIR
OBLIGED FRIEND,
AND
OBEDIENT SERVANT,
WILLIAM TOTTON.

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MY FRIENDS

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THE

BRITISH MUSEUM

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TO THE
WORTHY INHABITANTS
OF
LAYTON-STONE.

My honoured FRIENDS,

I Beg your acceptance of the following discourse, which was preached with a desire of alleviating the great concern you were under for the loss of our late excellent Friend Mrs. DUNSTER; and is now put into your hands, in hopes of removing entirely all remains of that sorrow which still sits heavy upon many of your minds.

But though I design this little present as a mark of my affection for you, I must
confess

ii DEDICATION.

confess I intend it likewise as a testimony of my regard to her. Not that she wants any encomiums from my pen to endear her memory to her friends, or perpetuate her name to posterity: for the one can never be forgotten, nor your love of the other be increased.

I have not therefore attempted to paint those excellencies, you have so long been charm'd with in the original; nor ventur'd to draw that character, which must lose much of its beauty even by a description from the most masterly hand.

Yet something I thought myself under an obligation to say of her, least I should seem wanting in that veneration and respect which is due to so deserving a Lady: and as you, who were acquainted with her life, will think no honour too much to be done
to

DEDICATION. iii

to her Memory, I persuade myself you will favourably look upon this little attempt.

But I have still a further view in laying this discourse before you. I would willingly reconcile you to the thoughts of parting, not only with your friends, but with the world itself. I would gladly therefore put you in a way to meet it with transport instead of terror. Fain would I have your thoughts so intent upon that glorious scene which will soon open upon you, that the present might always appear to you as contemptible, as it is transient! And most ardently do I long that your hearts may so aspire after GOD, and an endless felicity with your REDEEMER on high, as may keep you from that very eager solicitude too many discover for temporal things; and lead you to that holy and heavenly life, which can only entitle you to the joys which are eternal.

If

DEDICATION.

If any thing I have said may promote
this great end, it will be an unspeakable
satisfaction to

your most

faithful friend,

and affectionate servant

William Totton.



Death to the good man, preferable to life.

A

S E R M O N, &c.

ECCLES. VII. I.

*The day of death is better than the day
of one's birth.*

AS this observation of King *Solomon's* seems to be the result of a long and universal experience of the unsatisfactoriness of all human enjoyments, it may appear at first sight to be nothing but the voice of fretfulness and discontent, rather than, what it is in fact, the language of sober reason and reflection.

Every man however will easily discover the great distinction which ought to be made between a peevish discontentedness with life, and a noble indifference for it: the first is highly criminal; the other most eminently virtuous: the one is the never failing source of trouble and unhappiness;

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the other is the solid foundation of pure tranquillity and peace. Whoever can discover this, will see the justness and propriety, the wisdom and beauty of the maxim laid down by the wise man in the text.

After having considered in the fix foregoing chapters the vanity of all those things in which men place their happiness, he proceeds to furnish us with such sentiments as might be likely to procure us the felicity we search for, if we would suffer ourselves to be influenced by them: among which, this in the text is one of the most principal; by which he endeavours to persuade us, that this life is so far from deserving that intense degree of affection we bestow upon it, that it scarcely merits any affection at all; but that we ought to look upon the last day of it, much more desirable than the first,

I am sensible this is a doctrine which will appear unintelligible to the greatest part of mankind. Men have their hearts so entirely engrossed by the things of this world, that instead of rejoicing in that day which is to separate them from their earthly joys for ever, it is a thought that brings with it unspeakable torture. The proud, the ambitious, the sensual and the covetous, all of them find pleasures too captivating in the indulgence of these dispositions, to be parted with so very calmly; and though the sentiment in
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the text dropped from the pen of the wisest of the sons of men, they cannot but think his wisdom was a little departed from him; since they can form no idea of such an indifference. We shall see hereafter, it is no wonder they cannot: as it will appear from the reasons upon which the propriety of this observation is founded, that it can be the proper sentiment of none but a pious and religious mind.

For, in the first place; it is only to such a man that this world appears in its true light. He sees it to be no place of real and solid happiness; and he believes what the Scripture has told us, that, "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards" This is so unavoidably the lot of humanity, that no condition of life ever exempted any man from it. But let not this be looked upon as any impeachment of the sovereign wisdom and goodness which formed, and governs the universe: for, to the everlasting praise and glory of those great attributes, be it ever remembered, that God has not been wanting in any thing that might be conducive to the happiness of his creatures; but that all our misery is from ourselves.

Contemplate the world around you. Though blasted by the curse of almighty wrath, it still is enriched with unnumbered blessings, for the comfort and delight of its ungrateful inhabitants. Though the first fair face of the creation was

spoiled for the punishment of the first audacious offender, still we must acknowledge it presents unbounded beauty to the raptured eye; and the robe of smiling nature preserves something of its original splendor: if then the rational and moral part of the creation was but as beautiful and orderly as the natural world, we might expect, even at present, a felicity with less interruption and fewer allays. But this was alone the privilege of man in innocence. Now, so perverted are the designs of Providence for the general good, by the folly and vice, the irregularities and misconduct of individuals, that, as happy as the world might be, if all things were governed by those beautiful laws the CREATOR intended they should be, it is in vain to look for happiness in such a mangled and disordered system.

Anger and pride; lust and intemperance; malice and envy; ill-nature and censoriousness; fraud and deceit; uncharitableness and revenge; these are the horrid blemishes which men have introduced into the moral world; which have greatly deformed the original beauty of it; and not only render it dangerous and unsafe, but uncomfortable to a good man to be any longer an inhabitant of it.

This unpleasing prospect no doubt it was that forced a noble heathen to cry out, that, "the best thing was never to be born; and the
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“ next best, to die presently” He looked indeed no farther, than the present life; and having therefore no reviving prospect in a life to come, this appeared to him truly deplorable; being exposed to such a variety of unhappiness which must be the consequence of so much depravity; such a general and profligate corruption of humanity.

Some good minds perhaps may be led to hope an over-ruling providence will graciously interpose to prevent the evil effect of men’s vices, and passions from extending beyond themselves: but there is much more reason to expect God will suffer every one to partake of that trouble, disquietude and misery, which, to speak the truth, we every one of us in some measure contribute to. For all men have their passions; and few among us all but give way to them; and so long as that is the case, it will be unreasonable in any one to expect never to feel the consequences of other’s passions, while his own are often the causes of uneasiness to other men.

This then appears to be undeniably the case; that unhappiness is generally reciprocal; and reasonable beings, who were placed in the same rank of creation to be the comfort and felicity of each other in their passage through this stage of their existence, are the principal authors of each other’s misery; so strangely are the designs of providence

providence disappointed by the unaccountable infatuation of mankind.

From such a disordered and distracted scene of things, who would not be glad to make his escape as soon as he could; and find a peaceful refuge in the grave? the consideration of which drew from the wise man that most pathetick exclamation, “ Wherefore, I praised the dead, “ which are already dead, more than the living “ which are yet alive: yea, better is he that hath “ not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work “ that is done under the sun!”

But suppose we could be effectually secured from the malice and ill-will of others; and were in no danger of having the tranquility of our lives disturbed by their frailties and follies; yet to our great unhappiness we find we are often falling out with ourselves: and in truth, with very good reason: for nothing can be a more reasonable ground of displeasure than our own stupidity; first to seek for happiness where it is never to be found; and then to be angry we are not able to meet with it. This is a conduct which justly deserves our indignation; though we do not always enough discover the folly of it, to be displeased at it: and hence it is, we are often uneasy without perceiving the cause; which is a sort of unhappiness most men in the world have experienced.

Diffatisfaction

Diffatisfaction of mind attends the most exalted stations of human life ; and the most convincing proof that scarce any man ever yet was truly happy, is, that scarce any man ever yet arrived at that state where he did not discover something further to hope for. Our case is something like that of a traveller upon the Alps (as it is beautifully represented by an ingenious writer) who imagines the top of the next hill will end his journey because it terminates his prospect ; but he no sooner arrives there, but he discovers new ground, and other hills beyond it ; and continues to travel on as before. Thus in our search after happiness ; we fancy we shall attain it when we have compleated such a design ; but when we have succeeded in that point, we find ourselves just as far from true felicity as before. Having therefore so much reason to despair of finding it, why may we not with great propriety look upon that day which is to put an end to such a troublesome and ineffectual pursuit as more welcome than that in which we began it ? It is something strange this is not the universal sentiment of mankind ; and that any one should think of arriving at happiness by that way in which every one knows, that thousands have been disappointed before him,

I shall not mention the numberless pains and insupportable diseases to which our frail natures
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are hourly liable; and by which a state of the highest human felicity would soon be rendered uncomfortable and wretched. This cannot be alledged as a general proof that our dissolution is desirable, because it is a reason that will not extend to all; since many in the world enjoy a perpetual freedom from them, But without the assistance of this argument, it appears sufficiently, from the foregoing observations, that the day of death is better than the day of one's birth, as it removes us for ever from that troubled state of things, wherein we scarce have seen any man truly happy, and in which it is likely we never shall.

If it should be urged in confutation of this assertion, that a good man is always so; I shall readily acknowledge the truth of the observation as it is the best confirmation of all I have said: for the good man is therefore happy, because he never depended upon any thing in this world to make him so. His happiness flows from a higher source; from him who is the supreme inexhaustible fountain of it; it is hid with CHRIST in God, and he is not obliged to the paltry perishable delights of this dim spot for the envied felicity he enjoys. Such a man's happiness therefore is so far from proving this world to be a desirable place, that it is the very reason he would be

be glad to be out of it, as we shall see more fully under my third head.

But perhaps after all, the worldling will laugh and tell us we are mightily mistaken; and that he can produce his own experience to prove this world is not so devoid of happiness as I have represented it. But let us only contemplate a little what it is this deluded mortal calls happiness, and we shall find, it is himself is under the mistake.

And what is it, but one continual and insipid round of the same nonsense and vanity! a perpetual fluttering from one vain joy to another as poor and unsatisfying: and all to fill up the vacancies of time and thought; and keep him from discovering his real wretchedness; whoever can be content with such a happiness, will never be envied for the choice he has made; since after all their mighty boast, we see even these happy mortals, upon the least interruption of their joy, plunged into a state of the greatest abjectness in the world; and uncommonly oppressed with drooping spirits and a dejected mind.

This then is the first argument that naturally occurs to a religious and attentive mind for the truth of *Solomon's* observation in the text, that this world is no place of solid happiness; and it were better to get well, and safely out of it as soon as we can. The second I shall offer, carries

still greater weight with it; being drawn from the consideration that this life is designed only for a state of trial and probation.

Every man that thinks upon this with due seriousness and composure, will naturally be induced to wish it were well over; and highly rejoice in that day which is to close so awful and dangerous a state. It is a state of so much importance to us, that it is a wonder we can enjoy any peace and satisfaction while we are in it. What can be so awful, and what ought to be so alarming, as the reflection that an eternity of consummate blessedness, or inconceivable misery is depending upon our present conduct and behaviour? it is a thought that chills the soul with horror; and cannot but strike a deadly damp upon the hearts of those who are pursuing the vain joys of this perishable world with so much eagerness, and leaving themselves unprepared for that solemn reckoning to come. It is a thought that must make the best man among us tremble; and earnestly solicitous to be delivered from a state of so much hazard, where every moment an endless felicity is at stake. He looks round about him; and beholds with terror the thousand temptations that assault him on every side. He looks within; and is astonished at the treachery and deceitfulness of his own heart, which seems disposed to embrace the first favourable opportunity to sin, notwithstanding

notwithstanding his vigorous resolution against it. He sees with the utmost surprize and compassion, how many, of those who have made some progress in religion, are carried away from their duty by the most insignificant trifles! and what poor inconsiderable gratifications they are for which men are content to part with their innocence and integrity; rob God of the entire affection of their souls; and forfeit all their hopes of a blessed immortality. After such a review, can any thing be more natural for him, than to be afraid of continuing in such a world? being subject to the same passions and frailties of other men, he cannot tell how soon he may fall into the same folly and sin he now condemns in them! He cannot but live therefore in continual dread of falling from his perseverance; and rather than run the risque of so dreadful a defection, he is so wise as to look upon that day to be truly desirable, which effectually prevents it; by putting an end to any further trial of his virtue, and carrying him to receive that virtue's reward. Whoever has made any advancement in the ways of piety and holiness will look upon these sentiments as just; and even triumph in the thought of speedily finishing that probation, which the sooner we can finish the better; if it be but with glory to God; and honour and happiness to ourselves.

Was it possible therefore to arrive at a much more compleat degree of felicity than we ever shall in this life, yet because no state can place us out of the reach of temptations, and a prosperous condition most of all exposes us to their assault, it cannot but be a pleasing event, whenever it shall happen, to be removed into that state, where temptation shall be at an end, and sin and folly shall be no more: for who to enjoy a few more years of vanity, would run the hazard of losing the blessedness of eternity.

But lastly. There is one consideration more that sets before us the justness and truth of *Solomon's* declaration in so strong a light, as places the matter beyond all doubt.

The day of death is better than the day of one's birth, as the one only introduces us to a scene of perpetual trouble and uneasiness, discipline and trial; but the other brings us to a state of glory and reward: to those peaceful regions where all will be harmony and love, and uninterrupted tranquility for evermore. Death puts us at once in the possession of a supream, unchangeable and everlasting good; what we have long been wandering after here in vain! It carries us to him whom our soul loveth and longeth after! To him who is the fountain of happiness, and at whose right hand it will for ever flow: who can make us blessed in ten thousand ways, as much beyond
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our conception, as above our deserts. Every moment then which keeps us here, keeps us from true happiness. This is a state of banishment in which we are detained, and kept at a distance from that great and good SAVIOUR the sight and enjoyment of whom, constitutes the highest blessedness.---“ This,” saith St. Austin, “ is the com-
 “ pleat beatitude of glorified spirits ! this is the
 “ joy of the blessed angels ! this their everlasting
 “ delight, and eternal triumph ! to behold him
 “ who made Heaven and earth ; who created
 “ and redeemed us ! the sight of thee O GOD is
 “ all our wages ! all our recompence ! all the joy
 “ and felicity we can hope or have ! how glori-
 “ ous a kingdom is thine my GOD and SAVIOUR ;
 “ where every servant of thine sits in state with
 “ thee ; decked with light as with a garment !
 “ where thou thyself art present ; the hope of
 “ the faithful ; and the diadem of their everlast-
 “ ing glory !” “ In this glorious kingdom,” as
 an ingenious writer expresses it, “ is joy without
 “ sadness ; health without sickness ; happiness
 “ without abatement ; and goodness without al-
 “ lay ! here pain is never felt ; complaint never
 “ heard ; grief is never seen ; and disappointment
 “ never feared :” And all from being blessed with
 the fruition of GOD, who is the fulness of all fe-
 licity.

And

And who then will not confess with *Solomon*, that the day of death is better than the day of one's birth, which translates us to such ineffable joys? when the prison doors are opened, and the soul marches up in triumph, conducted by the blessed angels to its father's mansion; and after being presented before the throne of the most high, takes its place amongst those happy spirits to live and reign with its REDEEMER for ever.

Though the day of our birth then is a day to be remembred with gratitude, thankfulness and joy; as we then were honoured with a place among reasonable beings, and by that means made capable of knowing, loving, resembling and enjoying God; yet should the day of death be still dearer to us; since whatever glorious prospects we have before us on account of that rank we hold in the creation of God, they are all placed on the other side the grave; and we must pass through the valley of death before we can attain that incorruptible inheritance our REDEEMER hath purchased and reserved in Heaven for us.

The day of our birth is only the beginning of a short and perishing life; but the day of our death is our entrance upon an everlasting state; and if we rejoice in the former because it brings us into that state of being where we receive daily testimonies of the love and goodness of our great CREATOR, how much more ought we to rejoice
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in the latter which introduces us to his immediate presence, where there will be nothing to interrupt the happy intercourse between us; but where we shall be perpetually enlivened by fresh communications of his goodness! perpetually transported by beholding new manifestations of his greatness and glory; and being filled with love, admiration and gratitude shall unite perpetually with the illustrious choir in praising his glorious Name: by all which means together, we shall enjoy an incessant and unallayed felicity for ever.

Well then might the Apostle cry out, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with CHRIST, which is far better." Far better indeed than any thing this world can offer or bestow; and far better therefore, as the wise man observes, must be the day of death than the day of one's birth, which brings us into so exalted, and desirable a state.

We now, from what has been said, may discover the reason that the doctrine of the text is so very unpleasing and unintelligible to the greatest part of mankind. We see it is no wonder the day of death should appear to the worldly minded, the ambitious and the sensual a day of the utmost misery and horror. Alas! they have no other joys to expect when these are taken from them! they have thought of no other pleasures than what this world could furnish; and have taken no care to secure an interest in that Almighty

mighty Being, who is to appoint us our unchangeable portion for ever! - death therefore cuts them off at once from all things that afforded them satisfaction in this life, and they have nothing to look for in that life to come: they have received their consolation here; and only judgment and fiery indignation attends them hereafter.

Whence it appears in the second place, that the sentiment in the text can only be the proper sentiment of a pious and religious mind, which leads me to the practical inference to be drawn from this whole discourse, that we take care to conduct our lives in such a manner that the thought of our death, instead of terror, may give us joy. Till we can contemplate that awful moment with satisfaction and serenity, we may be assured we are unprepared to meet it.

If we tremble at the reflection upon that solemn leave we are very soon to take of this poor world, (perhaps much sooner than many of us expect) we may depend upon it, it is because we have bestowed too much affection upon it, and too little upon God. Such a dread can only arise from a consciousness of being without those christian virtues which can alone recommend us to his favour; and from a sad recollection that we have not passed that holy and heavenly life, which can only brighten up the valley of the shadow of death.

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Let us therefore my beloved brethren, as the vital spring and principle of all true religion, love God! love him with a supream undivided affection! with all our heart; and mind; and soul; and strength! it will then be impossible to offend him: but with the utmost chearfulness and steady perseverance we shall walk in the ways of his commandments; and our duty will be our joy.

Thus will that tremendous hour which strikes agony into the hearts of thousands, inspire us with a most enlivening confidence; we shall at all times contemplate the happy moment with delight, and meet it with transport whenever it arrives.

And now, from the observations we have been led to make in this discourse, I am in hopes we shall be able to draw some consolation to alleviate that great and just concern many of us cannot but feel for the loss we have lately sustained; and with this view I pitched upon this particular subject: for since the divine Providence hath been pleased, almost before our tears were dried up for the loss of our late worthy friend, to afflict us with the death of his truly valuable lady; I could think of no means more likely to assuage our swelling grief, and suppress each rising sigh, than to represent that awful change she has made, as a most happy, and glorious event. Considering it in this light, we shall acknowledge it to be

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matter of thankfulness and joy; rather than a reason for lamentation and complaint.

And what, in the first place is her departure from us but a blessed release from a very uncomfortable disorder to which she had been subject many years; which indeed she endured with true christian fortitude and resignation: but which, notwithstanding the chearfulness she always preserved, could not but render life a little burthensome and unpleasant, though her inward happiness could never be affected by it: for religious peace and joy are of too sublime a nature for any external circumstances to deprive us of. We are not indebted to the world for that gift; nor depend upon it for the continuance.

But farther. What is her departure from us, but a happy deliverance out of a silly, vain and sinful world! where every good mind sees daily more to lament, than to rejoice at; where instead of acting continually for the glory of God, men seem to have no other desire but that of pleasing and aggrandizing themselves. Where those who are most distinguished by the blessings of providence are most ungrateful to the bountiful author; and as *Jeshurun* is described by the prophet, "wax fat and kick, and forsake the LORD that made them; and lightly regard the GOD of their salvation." Where those who will dare to profess any great degrees of love to GOD and our SAVIOUR,

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are looked upon, and laughed at as enthusiasts, and madmen! Where men riot in abundance; and glory in their shame; pampering the body to the destruction of the soul. Where the love of vanity in some; the thirst after riches in others; the indulgence of luxury in many; and the desire of pleasure in the most of us, alienate our hearts and affections from God; destroy our relish of divine things; drown the the tremendous thought of eternity; create a total disregard of that glorious part of us which must live for ever; and leave men utterly unprepared for that great day which is to place us before the throne of our judge; to receive his irrevocable sentence.

Out of such a world, and from the sight of so much sin and folly, our dear departed Friend is happily rescued; whose deep sense of the importance of religion gave her affectionate heart much anguish, when she reflected upon so many thousands going on with the utmost indifference about it; and with the greatest composure destroying themselves.

Again. What is her departure from us but a glorious conclusion of that solemn scene of probation upon which our unchangeable state for ever is to depend. How should it rejoice our hearts to recollect with what glory to God, and honour to our holy religion she passed through this important trial; adorning the doctrine of God our SA-

VIOUR in all things; and having her conversation becoming the Gospel of CHRIST. And as she passed through it in so exemplary a manner to others, I have the pleasure to tell you she finished it with the highest joy and comfort to herself; in ardent longings after the enjoyment of her CREATOR; and a sincere desire to be with CHRIST which is far better. This pleasing reflection will, no doubt, enable us to resign her up with more composure; and all, who sincerely loved her, will rejoice at so peaceful an end.

But there is one consideration more which cannot but raise our acquiescence into rapture: for

In the last place, what is her departure from us but going to God? the end of so holy, so excellent, so christian a life, is only the beginning of an ever blessed life with him! it is only an entrance upon that uncorruptible and undefiled inheritance we are promised with glorified beings on high! it is nothing but taking possession of that crown of life, which every one will obtain, who continues, as she has done, faithful unto death!

Where then is our love for our divine REDEEMER? that we do not rejoice, that one more member is added to his glorious kingdom? and where is our affection for her? that, while Heaven is filled with shouts of joy, and kindred spirits hailing the happy saint's arrival, we do not forget

forget our own loss, and unite in the celestial triumph!

Weep then no more for her; but weep for yourselves and your children: and, if sorrow could touch the blessed, she would join her friendly tears, in consideration that we are still in this vale of misery: our probation yet unfinished: our everlasting happiness yet unsecured!

Oh! may this reflection produce in us that seriousness which becomes creatures in so awful a situation! that (in imitation of our friend) amidst all our other pursuits we may never forget to make it our principal business, by real piety, and unshaken obedience to every command of the Gospel of CHRIST, to secure the favour of GOD, and the blessed hope of eternal life. Then will our departure from the unsatisfying pleasures of this transitory scene give us no uneasiness; as we shall be going to him who has all happiness in his gift; and can abundantly make up to us the loss of a much greater felicity than any we shall ever enjoy here.

This improvement, if we make of that bright bright pattern she has set us, it will indeed be for our happiness that we have enjoyed it; though much to our condemnation, if we do not. But because our sufficiency is only of GOD, let us, while we bless his holy name for all his saints and servants departed this life in his faith and fear,

fear, implore him likewise with unfeigned ardour to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that when we are delivered from this present evil world, we may be translated with them into the kingdom of his dear Son. To whom with the Father, and the holy Spirit be ascribed, as is most due, adoration and praise, might, majesty and dominion, now, and for ever. *Amen!*



F I N I S.